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PRESS RELEASE

The people of East Timor Have the Right to Self-defence

Jakarta, 6 April 1999 – The following information reached the office of the CNRT President, Xanana Gusmão at 9:30 pm (Jakarta time):

- Members of the Besi Merah Putih and Halilintar armed civilian militia groups backed by ABRI's Battalion 143, Koramil and Kodim, forced entry into the home of the priest of Liquica this afternoon and killed five people. It is not known if Father Rafael is one of the victims.
- They then stormed the church of Liquica and opened fire on the two thousand people who had taken refuge there (yesterday), throwing in hand-grenades. Forty casualties have been reported.

The death toll was confirmed to Bishop Ximenes Belo by Col. Suratman. Bishop Belo and Col. Suratman agreed to visit Liquica and the surrounding area tomorrow, 7 April 1999, to assess the situation on the ground.

Further reports specify that a forty Indonesian soldier roadblock has been set up on the road from Dili to Liquica and that a battalion of Indonesian military forces disembarked today in Dili at 2:00 pm (Dili time) from navy ship 504. All communications systems have been cut off in the Liquica area.

Yesterday, Xanana Gusmão reminded the world that the people of East Timor can no longer be expected to passively await death. They have the right to self-defence. As the Commander in Chief of FALINTIL, Xanana Gusmão asked FALINTIL to resume the mission they have been carrying out for the past twenty three years: to defend the people of East Timor from the murderous military occupation of their homeland.

Today, Xanana Gusmão called for the immediate deployment of a UN peace mission in the territory as proof of the international community's commitment to contribute to and implement a peaceful solution in East Timor.

As Xanana Gusmão was making this appeal today, and as world leaders were reacting to his statement of yesterday, the armed civilian militias and the Indonesian military assaulted the only place where the East Timorese population could feel safe and could be defended. They violated a sanctuary where unarmed civilians had taken refuge.

Unfortunately it has taken the loss of yet another 45 innocent lives for the world to note that Xanana Gusmão did not make a call for the People of East Timor to take up arms to take offensive action, but rather to defend themselves and resort to their own means to survive such barbarous and cowardly murders.

"I authorised the people to act against their attackers, not in the spirit of wanton violence and callous disregard for human life which motivates ABRI, but in pure self-defence," said Xanana Gusmão.

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